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ABSTRACT

A longitudinal study of stepfamilies, divorced maternal custody families, and nondivorced families was conducted to assess the competence of mothers in different family structures, examine stepfather-stepchild relationships compared to relationships between nondivorced biological fathers and their children, see how relationships changed over time for parents and children in remarried families, and examine how parenting in all three types of families might change as children grew older and moved further into adolescence. Three composite indices of parenting behavior (warmth, control, conflict) were drawn from self, spouse, and child reports in structured interviews. Analyses of the data revealed few overall differences in self, spouse, and child perspectives on parenting. While the general tendency appeared to be for parents and children to disengage as children grew older, family structure superimposed its own patterns over this general pattern. Homes with absent fathers and those adjusting to a stepfather appeared more vulnerable to disrupted parent-child relationships during adolescence. (NB)

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CG 021036

PARENTING ADOLESCENT CHILDREN IN NONDIVORCED, DIVORCED AND REMARRIED FAMILIES

Ann Hollier

There are several aspects of parenting in these families that we wanted to address. First, we wanted to assess the competence of newly remarried mothers compared to mothers in nondivorced households and divorced mother custody homes. Second, we wanted to examine stepfather-stepchild relationships in the early stages of their formation and compare them to those between nondivorced biological fathers and their children. Third, we wanted to see how relationships change over time for parents and children in remarried families as they negotiate new roles and integrate the stepfather into the family system. Finally, we were interested in how parenting in all three types of families might change as children grow older and move further into adolescence.

Insert Table 1 about here

Procedure

There are three composite indices of parenting behavior. Warmth measures parental affection, involvement in shared activities and rapport. Control assesses parents' awareness of their child's behavior, such as whether they monitor their child's friends, activities and whereabouts, as well as assessing parental influence over the child. Conflict measures the frequency of disagreements and assesses disciplinary strategies. These data are drawn from self, spouse and child reports in structured interviews.

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The data were analyzed in two ways. First, repeated measures MANOVA was used with sex of child and family type as between subjects factors, and with time and person's report as within subjects factors. Second, standardized scores were cluster analyzed to group parents according to their parenting style, clustering mothers and fathers separately within each wave. One set of cluster analyses was based on all adult report variables, including both self reports and spouse reports wherever available. The child reports were clustered separately.

Insert Graph 2 here

The derived clusters fall into four classes:

Authoritative parents are high in warmth and control but low in conflict. This cluster is usually the dominant parenting style and is singled out by family researchers as the type of parenting associated with the best outcomes for children.

Insert Graph 3 about here

Authoritarian parents are typically high in their frequency of affection. However, quality of involvement is poor. Authoritarian parents are high in control and very hostile with high conflict.

Insert Graph 4 about here

Permissive parents are moderately warm and low in conflict. What makes them distinctive is their style of parental control. They are above average in monitoring but well below the mean in perceived control of their children.

Insert Graph 5 about here

These first three clusters should be familiar from Diana Baumrind's work on parenting styles. We also found a fourth cluster of disengaged parents, representing a significant number of parents of adolescents, particularly those raising teenagers in nontraditional family forms.

Disengaged parents are below the grand mean on every indicator. They often resemble authoritarian parents in that their scores for warmth and control are even lower than their scores for conflict.

Differences in Perspective

There are few overall differences in self, spouse, and child perspectives on parenting. Both self ratings and ratings by the spouse are available for parental rapport, monitoring and control. These are remarkably consistent and differences are modest.

Insert Graph 6 about here

In general, where there are differences, husbands slightly overestimate their wives' scores seeing them as competent and involved, while wives slightly underestimated their husbands'.

Insert Graph 7 about here

The one exception is in remarried families with boys where just the reverse is true. Here, husbands see their wives as slightly less competent in virtually every respect, while spouse ratings are slightly more optimistic than self ratings of the stepfather's rapport and control. Many stepfathers with stepsons do not see themselves or their wives as competent parents.

When clustered, adult reports typically fall into three groups, authoritative, authoritarian, and disengaged. Reports on fathers show great sensitivity to paternal disengagement. Instead of a single disengaged cluster type, there are three. Moderate disengagement is more typical of nondivorced fathers while stepfathers are more likely to display a very disengaged or rejecting parenting style.

Insert Graph 8 about here

Children's reports are available for every parenting subscale except rapport. Whereas self and spouse reports differ only modestly, children give their parents dramatically lower scores than their parents give themselves.

Insert Graph 9 about here

The only exception is for conflict over adolescent issues. Here, boys report more conflict with their mothers and girls report more conflict with both parents than the parents themselves report.

Clusters formed from children's ratings are distinctive in two respects. First, authoritarian parents are seen as highly ambivalent. According to children, frequency of affection often exceeds even that of authoritative paretns, yet conflict and discipline are also extremely high. Second, many parents rated authoritative by adults are seen by children as permissive, especially mothers of girls in divorced and remarried households.

Superimposed upon these general report differences are more complex interactions. These will be discussed shortly.

Sex Differences

Many studies report differential parenting of sons and daughters, especially by fathers. While we found many sex differences, surprisingly few pertain to the entire sample and most of those are quite modest. Mothers are more concerned with the character development of sons, but the deviance of daughters. Fathers, especially in nondivorced families, are more tender with daughters but share more activities with sons. Both parents report higher conflict and more frequent discipline with sons, and while they decline over time, they diminish more slowly in relationships with boys.

Insert Graph 10 about here

These findings translate into sex differentiated parenting styles when parents are clustered. Where sex differences occur, daughters more often receive authoritative parenting than do sons. Differences were greatest for nondivorced fathers who are much more authoritative with girls. They were slightest for nondivorced mothers who have a high rate of authoritativeness with both sons and daughters, and for stepfathers who show little authoritativeness toward either. There are also sex differences in patterns of nonauthoritative parenting. These vary by sex of parent, sex of child, and family type and will be addressed as they affect conclusions about parenting in nondivorced, divorced, and remarried households.

Insert Graph 11 about here

Family Type Differences

Nondivorced Families. The mother-child relationship in nondivorced families becomes less intense as children grow older. Warmth, control, and conflict all diminish over the two years of the study. Only rapport -- the mother's feelings of closeness to the child -- remains the same. Compared to mothers in divorced and remarried families, these mothers show somewhat less affection but the quality of their involvement is as good or better.

When these data are clustered, nondivorced mothers are generally more authoritative than mothers in other family types. Those who are not authoritative are usually disengaged. Other types of nonauthoritative parenting differ by sex of child. Daughters are more likely than sons to rate their mothers permissive. Although overall rates of authoritarianism are low, most authoritarian nondivorced mothers have sons.

Fathers in nondivorced families resemble their wives in many respects but do show less affection, monitoring or discipline. Like their wives, they are detaching from their children over time. When clustered, these fathers consistently show high rates of authoritativeness. Daughters are especially favored. Like mothers, fathers of girls who are not authoritative are likely to be disengaged. Nonauthoritative fathers of boys however are much more inclined to be authoritarian.

Insert Graph 12 about here

Divorced Families. In divorced households, the mother and child reports are quite divergent in many respects. Mothers

report intense relationships, especially with daughters. They report high involvement, control, and monitoring, particularly for deviant behavior. According to their self reports, levels of conflict and discipline are similar to those in nondivorced families and they are gradually disengaging from their children over time.

In contrast, daughters agree that their mothers are highly involved but do not see them as particularly controlling or high in monitoring. Children report very high rates of conflict and discipline, and say they are escalating over time.

When clustered, divorced mothers show high rates of permissiveness with daughters, disengagement with sons, and authoritarianism with children of both sexes. Authoritarianism is especially high for boys, but by the end of the study, the number of girls rating their mothers authoritarian has increased fourfold.

Remarried Families. Of particular interest is the impact of remarriage on mother-child relationships and the development of relationships between stepfathers and stepchildren. Many areas of the mother-child relationship are affected, with mothers perceiving the least impact and children reporting the most.

At the initial interview, mothers see themselves as in control and aware of their children's lives, but their children disagree, a pattern typical of divorced households. Both control and discipline are very low for boys and monitoring is low for both sexes. Girls report high affection but also very high rates

of punishment.

When clustered, mothers prove to be more disengaged with boys but more permissive or authoritarian with girls compared to nondivorced mothers. Rejection and ambivalence is a parenting style not only of divorced mothers with sons but also of newly remarried mothers with daughters.

Reports are even less favorable at Wave 2. Monitoring diminishes further, and fathers report that mothers have a particular problem controlling deviancy in sons. At the same time though rates of discipline for girls are less extreme.

Insert Graph 13 about here

Cluster analysis at Wave 2 shows mothers of boys four to five times more likely to be disengaged than authoritative. Not only are many mothers disengaged, girls also report very high rates of permissiveness and ambivalence compared to other daughters. In fact, of all the parenting styles both boys and girls are least likely to rate their mothers authoritative.

At the final followup relationships have recovered remarkably. In particular, while mothers with daughters were initially a high conflict group, they are now one of the most harmonious. Many remarried mothers are once again in the authoritative cluster and they no longer differ in any striking way from mothers in other families in their distribution across parenting types.

Insert Graph 14 about here

Stepfathers differ most in self reports, but everyone agrees

their relationships with their new stepchildren are quite unlike those of other parents. The only area in which new stepfathers resemble other parents is conflict. They are dramatically lower than either their wives or fathers in nondivorced families on other variables, especially with boys, and girls report that they are punitive.

Over time, their initially low levels of warmth and control drop still further, although conflict also diminishes and relationships with stepdaughters become less hostile. By the final followup, stepfathers resemble nondivorced fathers in monitoring and conflict, however affection, rapport and control have stabilized at levels far lower. Almost universally, stepfathers of boys are the lowest on every aspect of parenting.

When clustered, nondivorced fathers are usually authoritative, especially with girls, while disengagement is the primary parenting style of stepfathers at all time points, especially with boys. Like fathers in nondivorced families, stepfathers treat boys and girls differently. They are more likely to be authoritative or only moderately disengaged with girls. Stepfathers of boys fall disproportionately into the very disengaged or rejecting parenting types, and very few indeed are authoritative.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the general tendency is for parents and children to disengage as children grow older, but family structure superimposes its own patterns over this general one.

Adolescence can be a confusing time for parents as well as for children. Homes with an absent father and those adjusting to a stepfather appear more vulnerable to disrupted parent-child relationships during adolescence.

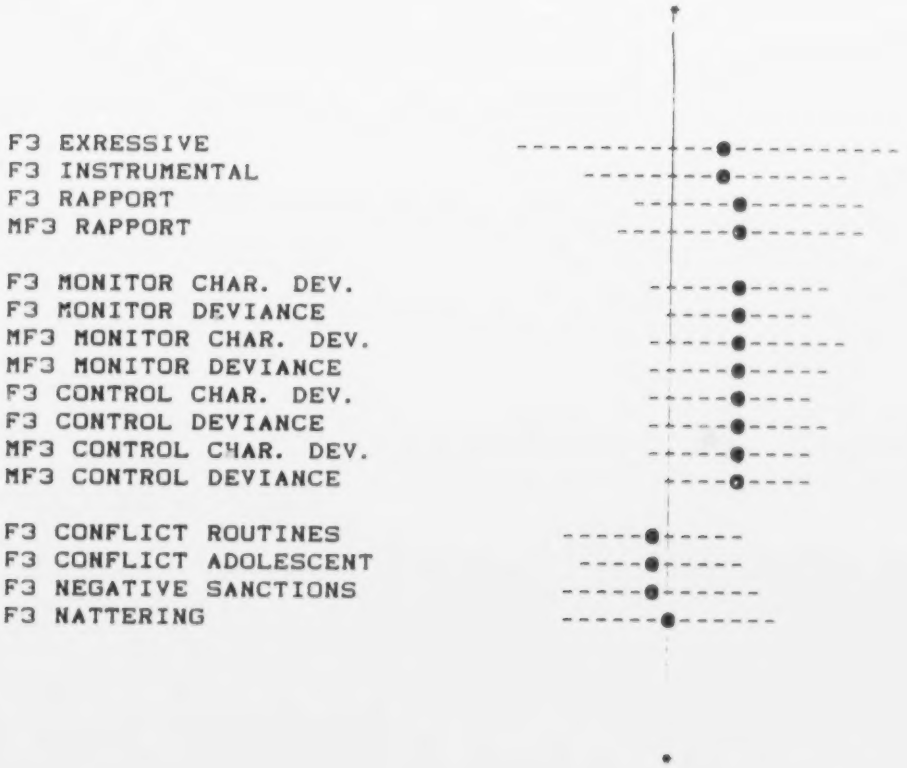
In divorced families, relationships run more to extremes of disengagement on the one hand or intense involvement and conflict on the other. In remarried families, mother-child relationships undergo a crisis followed by reorganization and recovery not unlike that seen following divorce. For a time mothers disengage from sons, while with daughters they may temporarily become either excessively permissive or hostile and punitive. There are large and enduring differences between nondivorced fathers and stepfathers however, particularly those who are raising sons. While all parents disengage from children over time, many stepfathers never really engaged to begin with.

A stepfather's role is ambiguous with children of any age, but building a new relationship with a teenaged stepchild may be especially hard. Younger children are more likely to accept a stepparent as a parent figure, while grown offspring don't need to. Teenaged stepchildren are in a twilight zone where they feel compelled to be warm and obedient toward someone they may view as an intruder--and at the very time when their own development required that they detach emotionally from the family, test limits, and establish their independence. Fathers with stepdaughters also experience the ambiguity of sharing a household with a nubile adolescent without benefit of the incest

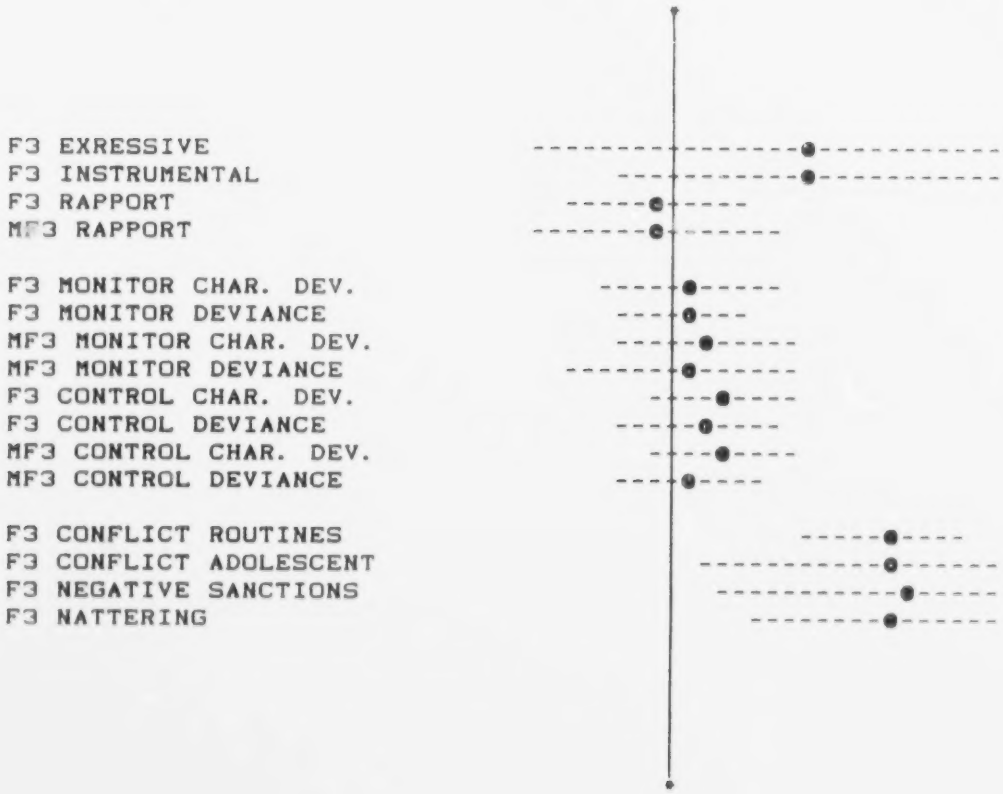
taboo that exists between biological fathers and daughters. All of these factors may contribute to the clear tendency of many of these stepfathers to distance themselves from their stepchildren. In the papers that follow, we will explore how these different family forms and patterns of parenting are related to child outcomes and to other areas of family functioning.

	SELF	SPOUSE	CHILD
WARMTH			
EXPRESSIVE AFFECTION	X		X
INSTRUMENTAL AFFECTION	X		X
RAPPORT	X	X	
CONTROL			
MONITOR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT	X	X	X
MONITOR DEVIANCE	X	X	X
PERCEIVED CONTROL OF CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT	X	X	X
PERCEIVED CONTROL OF DEVIANCE	X	X	X
CONFLICT			
FREQUENCY OF CONFLICT OVER DAILY ROUTINES	X		X
FREQUENCY OF CONFLICT OVER ADOLESCENT ISSUES	X		X
FREQUENCY OF NEGATIVE SANCTIONS	X		X
FREQUENCY OF NATTERING	X		X

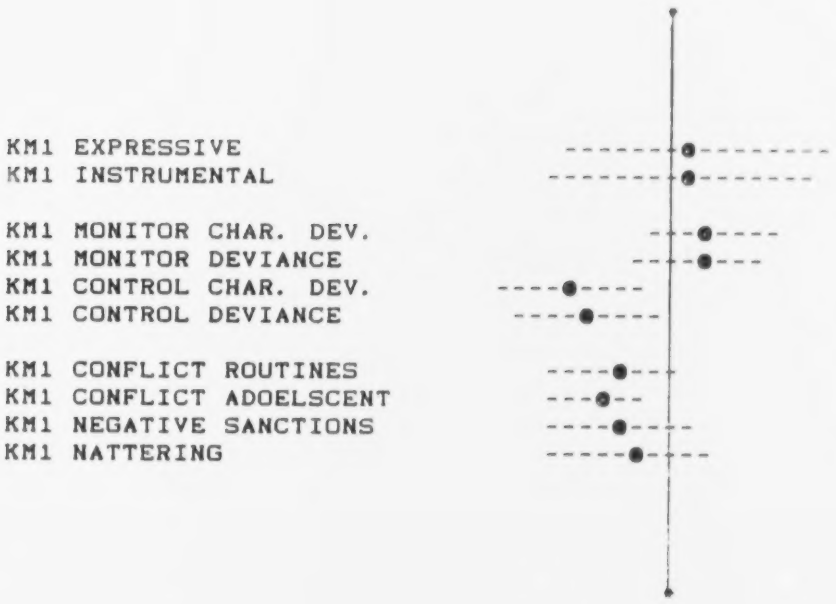
AUTHORITATIVE



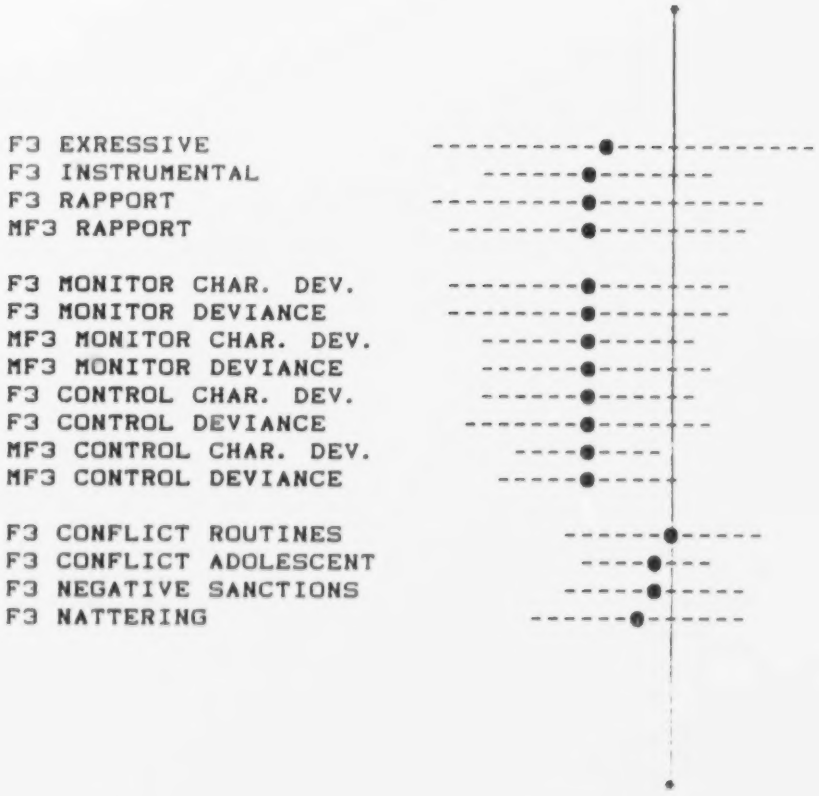
AUTHORITARIAN



PERMISSIVE

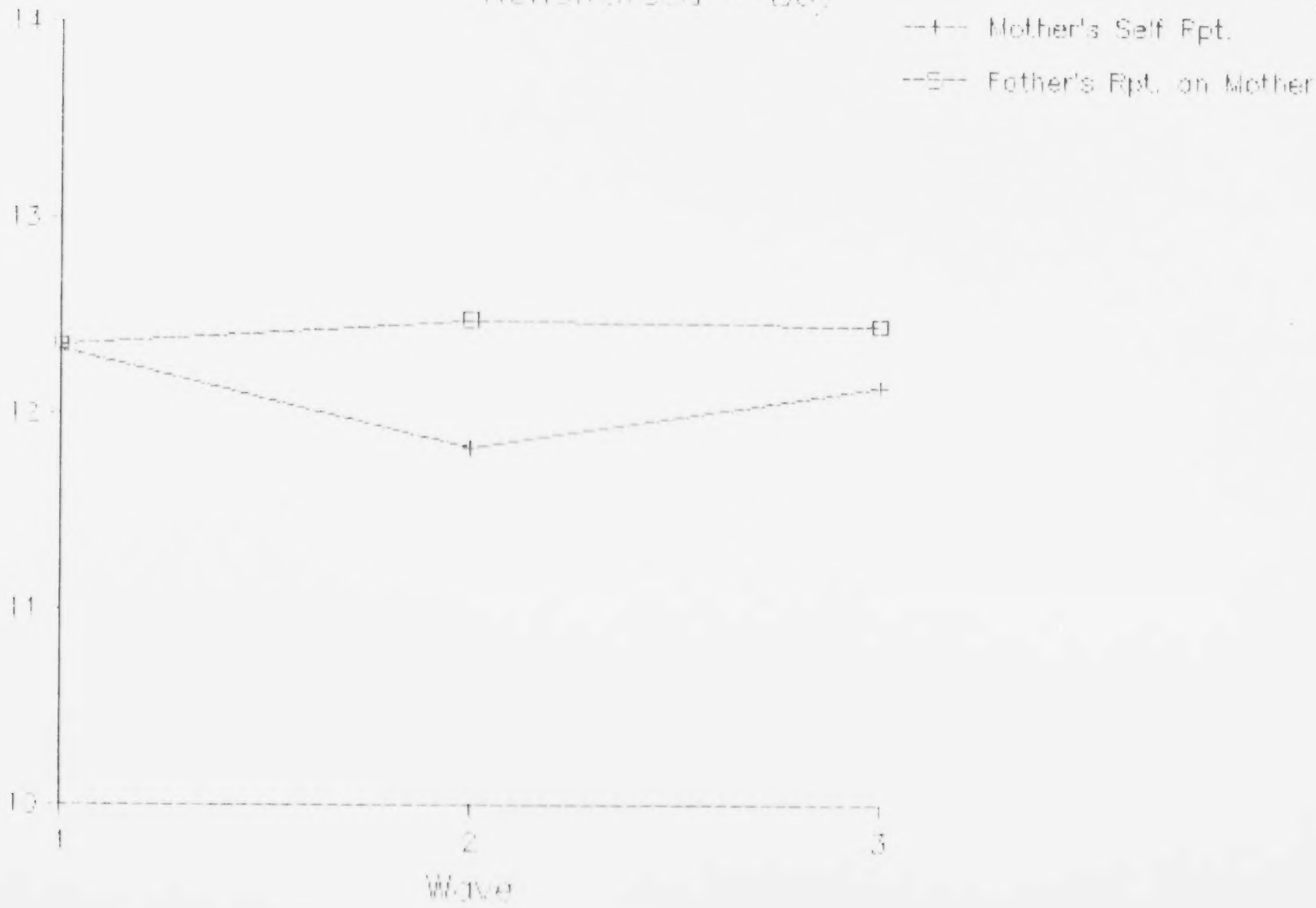

KM1 EXPRESSIVE
KM1 INSTRUMENTAL
KM1 MONITOR CHAR. DEV.
KM1 MONITOR DEVIANCE
KM1 CONTROL CHAR. DEV.
KM1 CONTROL DEVIANCE
KM1 CONFLICT ROUTINES
KM1 CONFLICT ADOELSCENT
KM1 NEGATIVE SANCTIONS
KM1 NATTERING

DISENGAGED


F3 EXRESSIVE
F3 INSTRUMENTAL
F3 RAPPORT
MF3 RAPPORT
F3 MONITOR CHAR. DEV.
F3 MONITOR DEVIANCE
MF3 MONITOR CHAR. DEV.
MF3 MONITOR DEVIANCE
F3 CONTROL CHAR. DEV.
F3 CONTROL DEVIANCE
MF3 CONTROL CHAR. DEV.
MF3 CONTROL DEVIANCE
F3 CONFLICT ROUTINES
F3 CONFLICT ADOLESCENT
F3 NEGATIVE SANCTIONS
F3 NATTERING

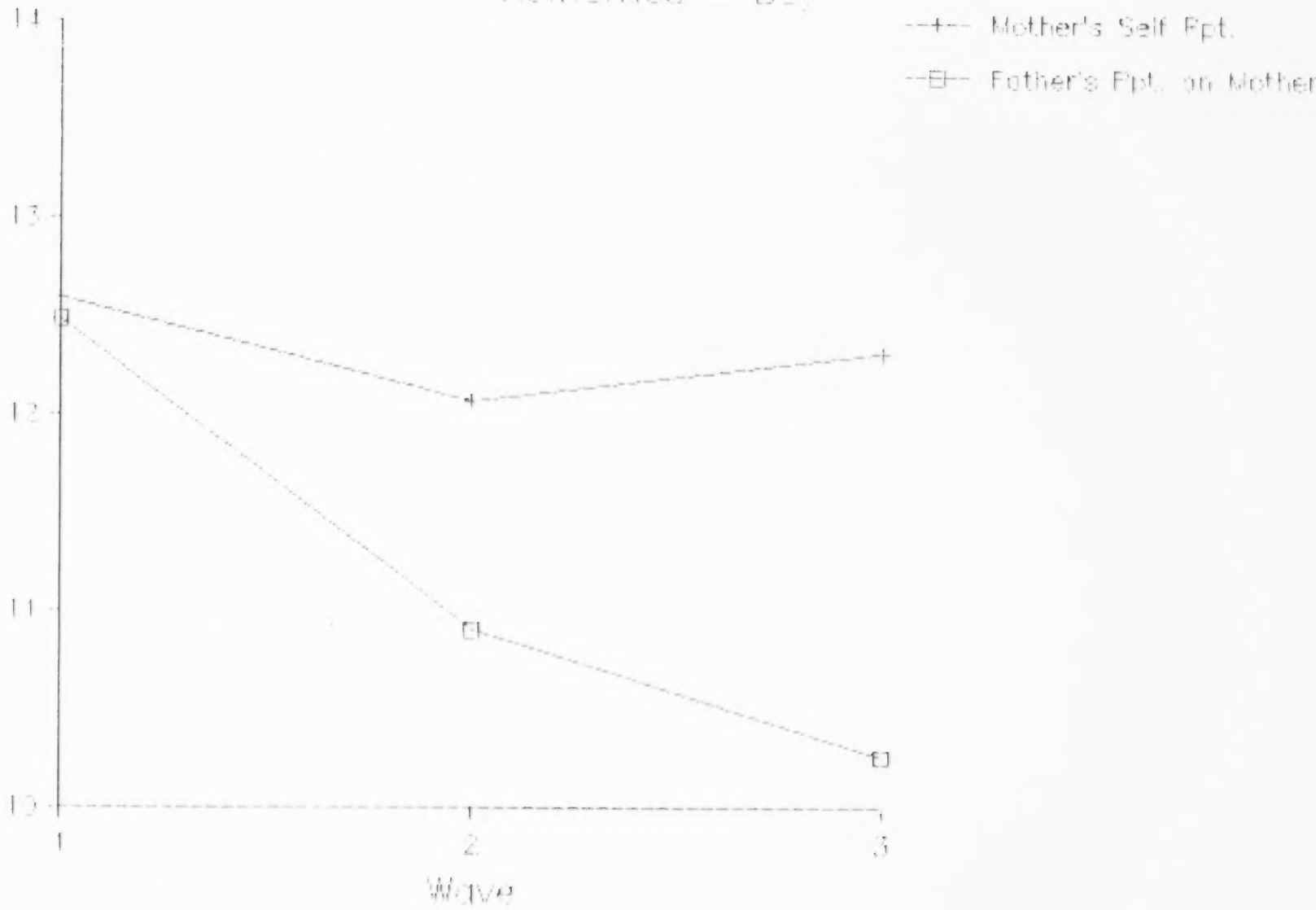
Mother's Perceived Control of Deviance

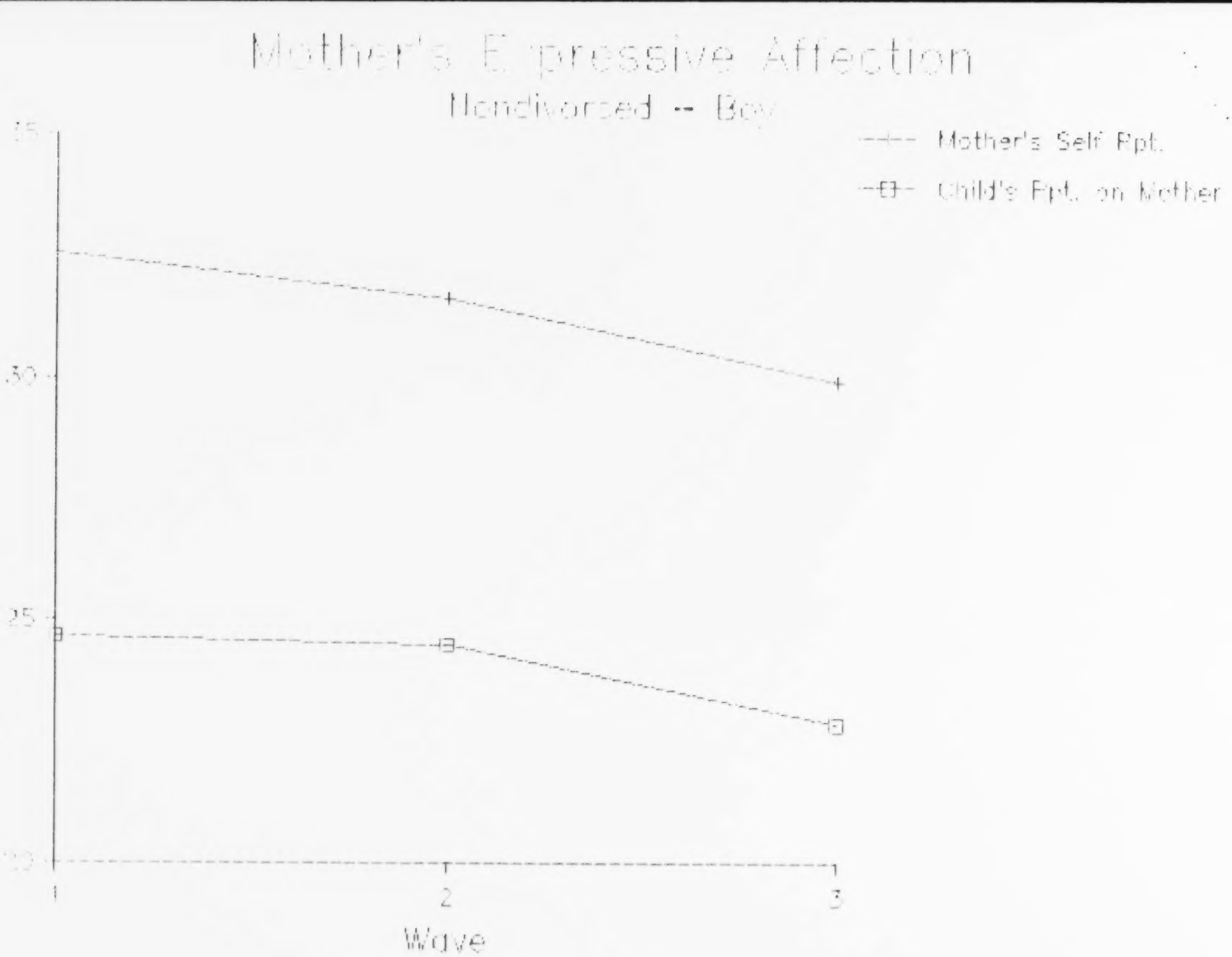
Nondivorced -- Boy



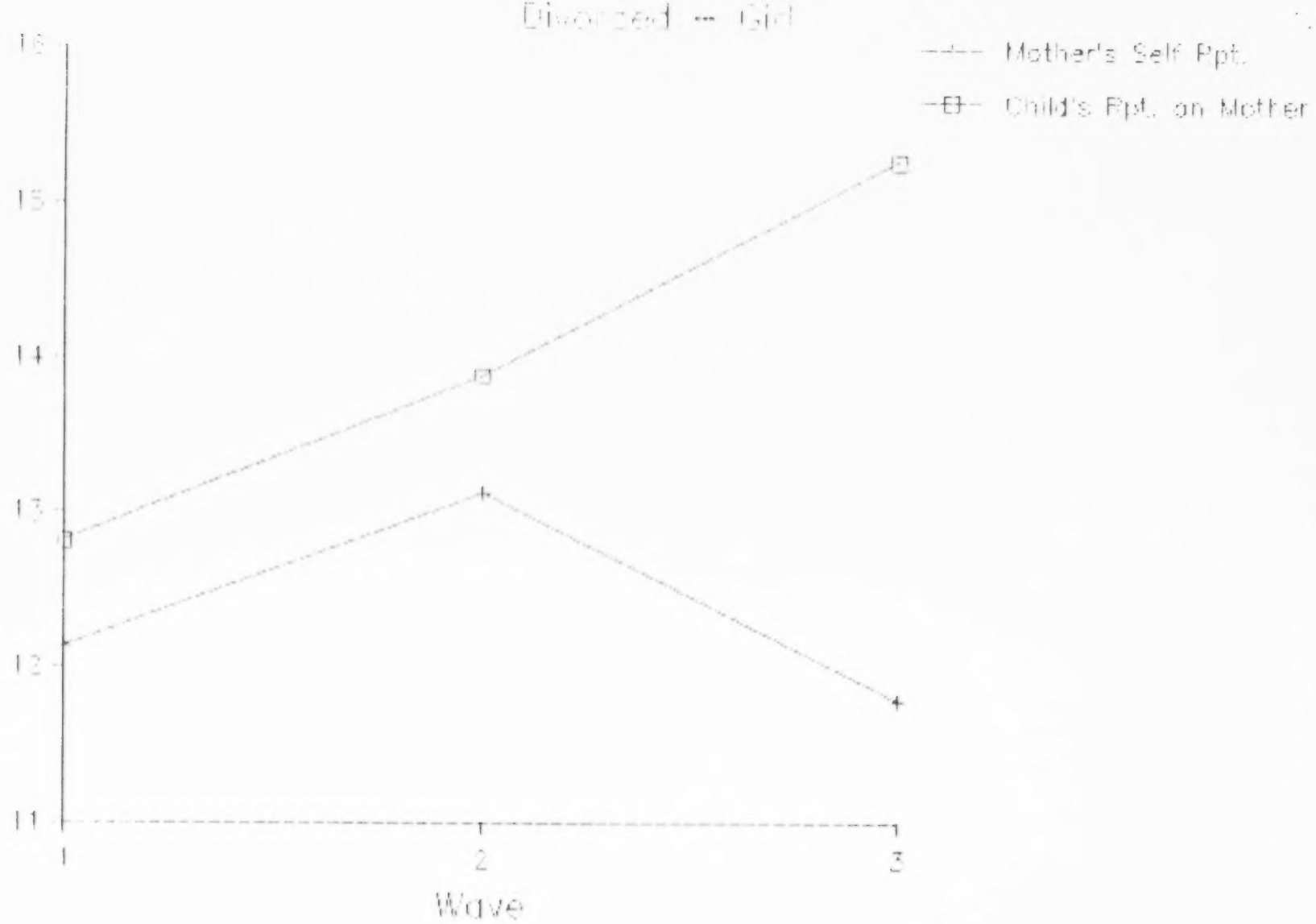
Mother's Perceived Control of Deviance

Remarried -- Boy



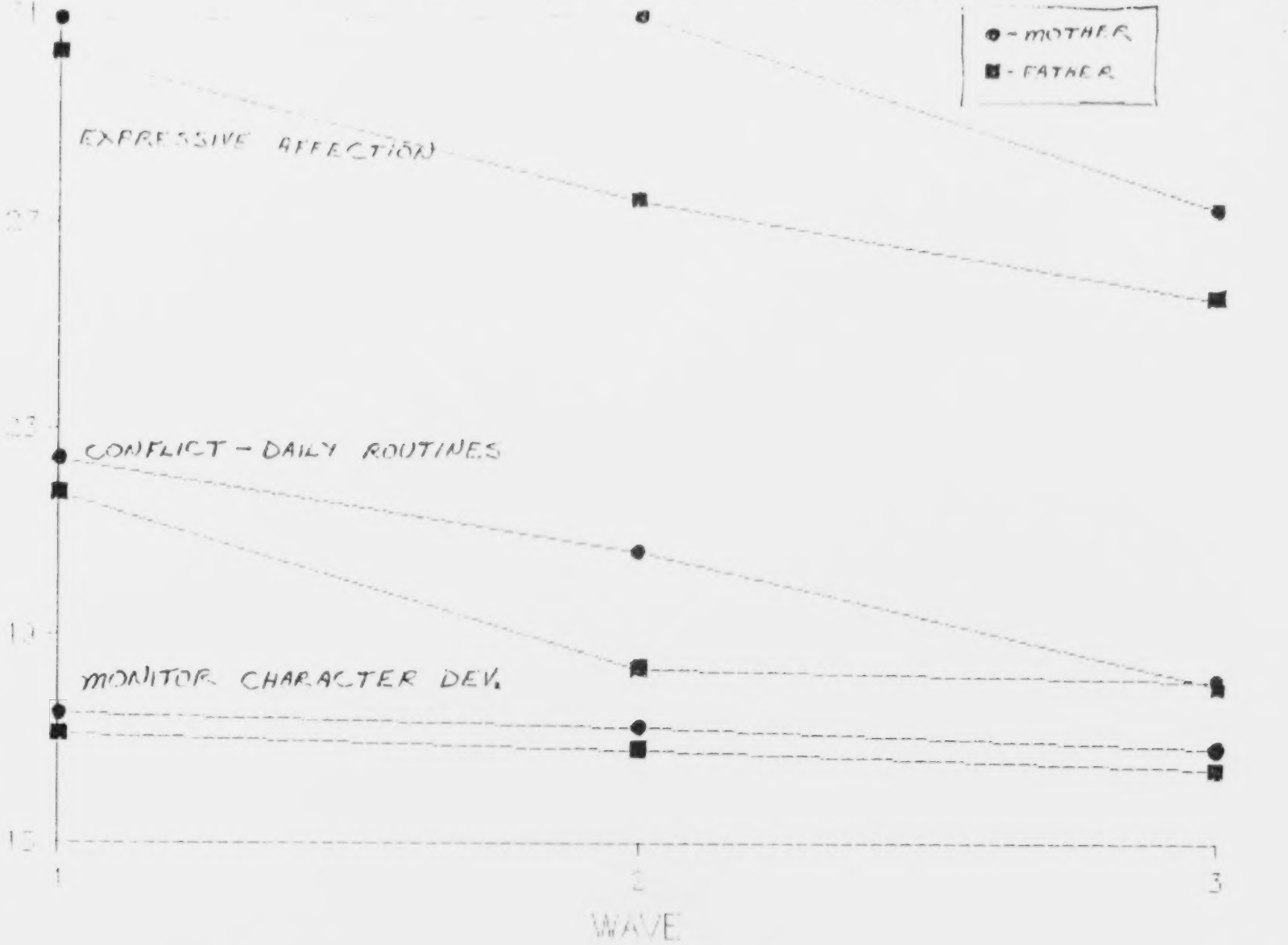

Mother's Expressive Affection
Nondivorced -- Boy
Mother's Self Rpt.
Child's Rpt. on Mother
35
30
25
20
1
2
3
Wave

Mother Conflict -- Adolescent Issues

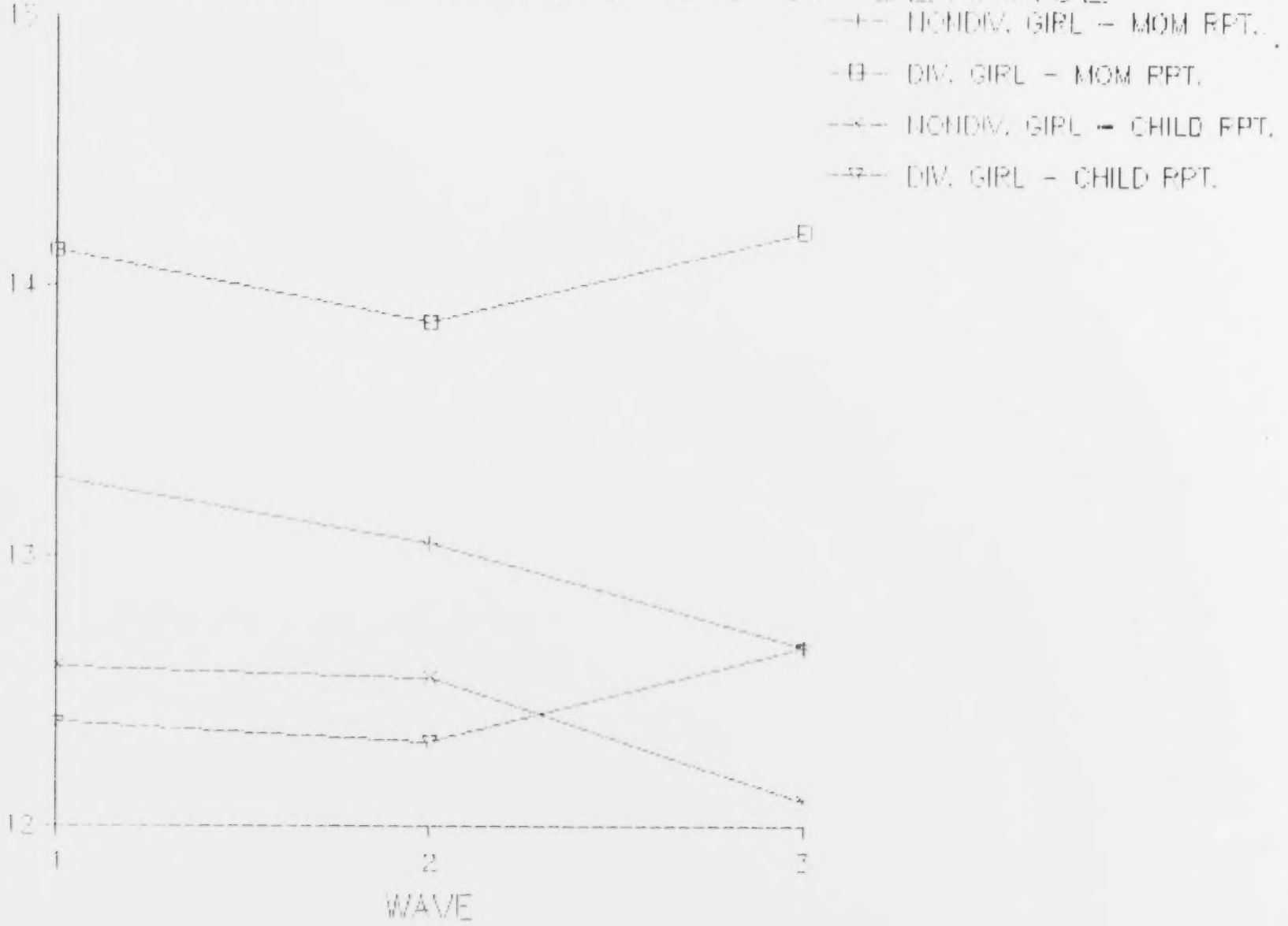


DISTRIBUTION OF PARENTING TYPES AT WAVE 2

	NONDIVORCED FATHER	NONDIVORCED MOTHER	STEP FATHER
BOYS			
% AUTHORITARIAN	38	30	32
% DISENGAGED	5	30	45
% AUTHORITATIVE	57	40	23
GIRLS			
% AUTHORITARIAN	8	14	23
% DISENGAGED	11	39	38
% AUTHORITATIVE	81	47	38

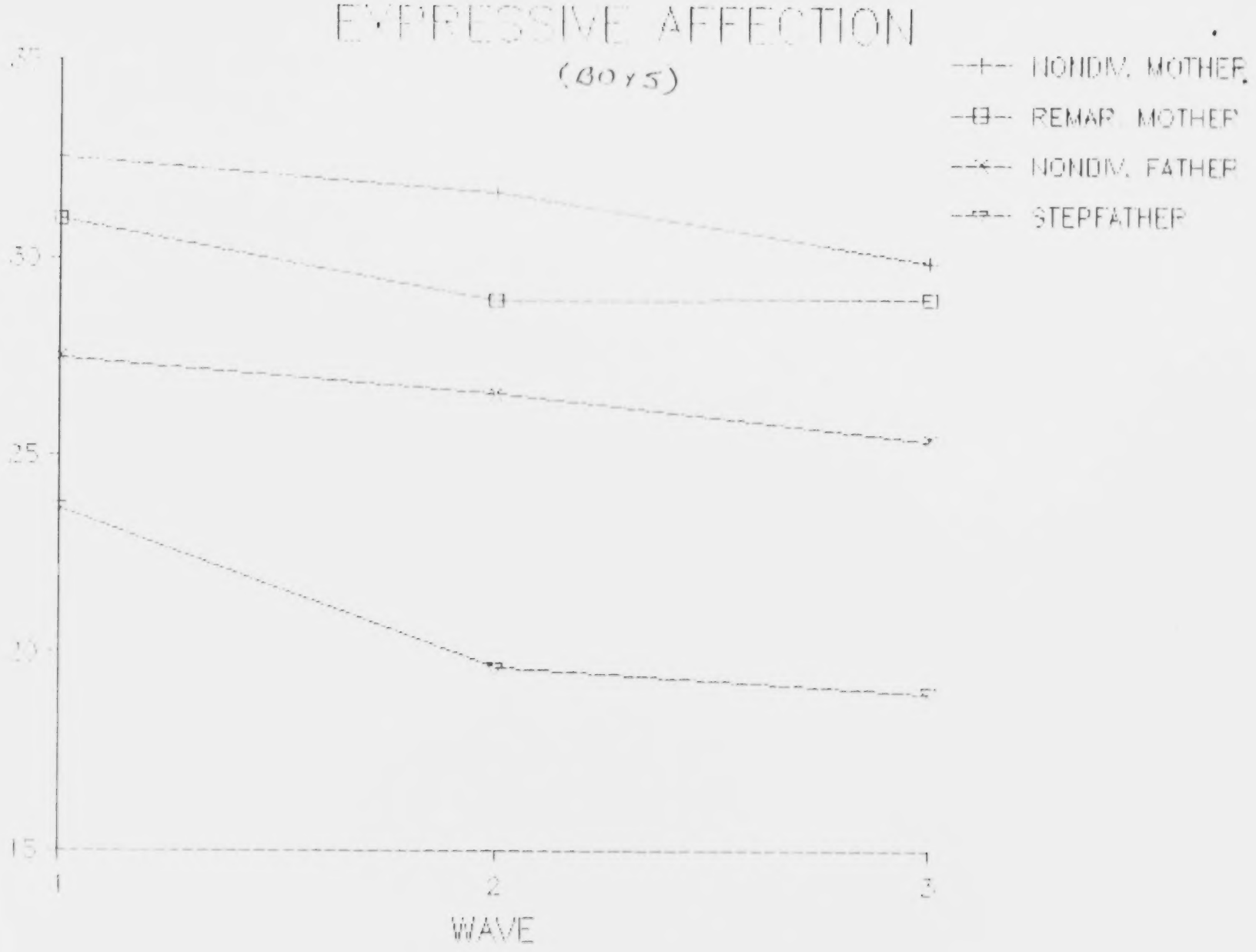

BOTH DIVORCED FAMILIES
● - MOTHER
■ - FATHER
EXPRESSIVE AFFECTION
CONFLICT - DAILY ROUTINES
MONITOR CHARACTER DEV.
27
23
19
15
1
2
3
WAVE

MOTHER'S MONITORING OF DEVIANCE



DISTRIBUTION OF PARENTING TYPES
IN REMARRIED MOTHERS - WAVE 2 CHILD REPORT

		BOY	GIRL
%	AUTHORITATIVE	9	8
%	AUTHORITARIAN	23	16
%	AMBIVALENT	14	16
%	DISENGAGED	36	20
%	PERMISSIVE	18	40


EXPRESSIVE AFFECTION
(80 x 5)
NONDIV. MOTHER
REMAR. MOTHER
NONDIV. FATHER
STEPFATHER
35
30
25
20
15
1
2
3
WAVE